REPORTON USE OFFORCE



Report on Use of Force: Death of Rafael Rodriguez (July 10, 2024)

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WARNING:

*This report contains sensitive content that is graphic in nature.



The Office of the Attorney General has completed its review of the July 10, 2024, death of Rafael Rodriguez ("Decedent"). This review is based upon all the evidence currently available. It has been determined that, based on the evidence currently available and subject to the discovery of new or additional evidence, the actions of Nevada Division of State Parks ("NDSP") Officer Travis Clinton were not criminal in nature.

This report is intended solely for the purpose of explaining why, based upon the facts known at this time, the conduct of the officer is not criminal, and therefore, why criminal charges will not be forthcoming against Officer Clinton. It is not intended to recount every detail, answer every question, or resolve every factual conflict regarding this matter. This decision, premised upon criminal-law standards, is not meant to limit any administrative action by the Nevada Division of Parks, or to suggest the existence or non-existence of civil actions by any person, where less stringent laws and burdens of proof apply.

II. INCIDENT SUMMARY



On July 10, 2024, NDSP Officer Clinton was involved in a shooting inside the Valley of Fire State Park On July 10, 2024, NDSP Officer Clinton was involved in a shooting inside the Valley of Fire State Park located approximately 40 miles south of Las Vegas. NDSP Officer Clinton conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle, later determined to be driven by the Decedent, Rafael Rodriguez. The Decedent was driving a 2003 Toyota Camry bearing Nevada license plate

Officer Clinton was driving his state issued vehicle, a Ford F-150 bearing Nevada license plate

The Decedent exited his vehicle without prompting and approached Officer Clinton with a bloody knife. Officer Clinton gave verbal commands to the Decedent to "drop the knife," before he discharged his department issued weapon several times and the Decedent collapsed. The Decedent stood back up and reengaged Officer Clinton, who fired additional rounds at the Decedent. The Decedent collapsed a second time and remained on the ground. He was later pronounced deceased at the scene. An investigation followed.

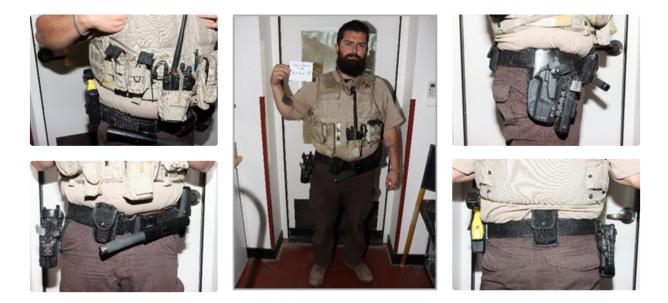
III. INVESTIGATION

A. SUMMARY OF WITNESS AND OFFICER INTERVIEWS

Law Enforcement Witnesses

1. NDSP Officer Travis Clinton

Officer Clinton began his workday at 0630 hours and was scheduled to work until 1630 hours at the Valley of Fire State Park. He was dressed in his department issued Park Ranger uniform, which consisted of uniform pants and shirt, as well as an outer vest carrier which displays his law enforcement badge on his left breastplate and his nameplate on his right breastplate. Officer Clinton was wearing his duty belt, which held his firearm, taser, baton and O.C. spray.² He had additional firearm magazines in his vest.



While driving on Valley of Fire highway, Officer Clinton was behind a "blueish gray" vehicle that had a broken taillight and was swerving on and off the roadway. Officer Clinton initiated a traffic stop by turning on his overhead lights and siren. The vehicle complied and pulled over to the side of the road and came to a stop. Officer Clinton reported the stop to dispatch before exiting his vehicle.

Officer Clinton said he exited his vehicle and turned to look behind him to make sure there was no danger of oncoming traffic before approaching the Decedent's vehicle. When Officer Clinton turned back to face the Decedent's vehicle, the Decedent was already out of his vehicle, armed with a large kitchen knife and approaching Officer Clinton. Officer Clinton noticed that the Decedent was not wearing a shirt, was covered in blood and screaming/shouting and making noises he didn't understand. The large kitchen knife was also covered with blood. Officer Clinton believed the Decedent may have stabbed someone in the park or in the Decedent's vehicle.

Officer Clinton said he retreated backwards and drew his department issued firearm and ordered the Decedent to "drop the knife" and "get on the ground." Officer Clinton continued to retreat backwards but the Decedent sped up his approach. At this point, Officer Clinton estimated he fired his weapon between six and eight times at the Decedent. Officer Clinton said the Decedent kept coming towards him, he didn't flinch and didn't make a noise.

Several times throughout the interview, Officer Clinton stated "I really thought he was going to get me because I honestly thought I was missing my shots. And I remember thinking he is going to stab me, and he is going to kill me because I cannot hit him." He later stated "I can't run backwards as fast as he is coming at me. I'm going to have to shoot him. When I started shooting and he was just not stopping, he didn't make a noise, didn't react. I honestly thought I was missing my shots. I thought he was going to kill me. I thought he was going to catch up to me and he was going to stab me. All I could think was trying to shoot as much as I could to try and get him to stop at that point. But he was not stopping and for a little bit there I really thought he was going to kill me." Eventually the Decedent fell to the ground, about ten to fifteen feet away from Officer Clinton.³ At this point, Officer Clinton ran around the Decedent to get back to his patrol vehicle. At the same time, Officer Clinton witnessed the Decedent get back up to his feet. Officer Clinton estimated the Decedent was down maybe two to three seconds. The Decedent was still holding the knife and again started to walk towards Officer Clinton. He doesn't recall if he ordered additional commands to the Decedent at this time. Officer Clinton fired an additional one or two rounds at the Decedent causing him to fall back to the ground. Officer Clinton remembers doing a tactical reload of his firearm but couldn't recall if that occurred before or after he fired his gun a second time.⁴ Officer Clinton got on his park radio, advised of the officer involved shooting and requested back-up.

A short while later, Officer Connor Perius and Officer Wishengrad arrived on scene. While Officers Perius and Wishengrad detained the Decedent and provided medical aid, Officer Clinton returned to his vehicle and began vomiting. He recalled speaking to an administrative assistant over the park radio and requesting additional 911 resources to include paramedics and police officers.

2. NDSP Officer Connor Perius

Officer Perius reported hearing Officer Clinton call out a traffic stop on the radio. About two minutes later, he heard Officer Clinton on the radio saying, "shots fired; I need Connor here now." Officer Perius said he left the visitor center and arrived on scene approximately two or three minutes after the initial call of shots fired. When he arrived on scene, he noticed the Decedent laying in the roadway and Officer Clinton was standing next to his patrol vehicle with his gun drawn. He noted Officer Clinton's patrol vehicle lights were activated when he arrived on scene.

Officer Clinton explained to Officer Perius what had happened thus far. The two discussed how they would approach the suspect. Officer Perius noted Officer Clinton was super emotional. About five minutes after arriving on scene, Officer Wishengrad arrived to assist. Officer Clinton and Perius provided cover by pointing their firearms at the Decedent while Officer Wishengard approached the Decedent and placed handcuffs on him. Officer Perius observed Officer Wishengard rolling the Decedent over and finding a knife under the Decedent's body. Officer Wishengard moved the knife out of Decedent's reach.

[3] CSA determined the distance to be 38 feet, 6 inches away.

Officer Perius then approached the Decedent and assisted Officer Wishengard in administering medical aid. Officer Perius placed a chest seal to a wound on the Decedent's shoulder and applied gauze to other injuries. He noted multiple bullet wounds on the center of the decedent's chest, shoulder, lower abdomen and one on his arm.

3. NDSP Officer Seth Wishengrad

Officer Wishengard arrived on scene and observed the suspect lying face down in the road. He also observed cuts and bruises on Decedent's arm. Officer Wishengrad was located to the west of the Decedent, and he observed Officer Perius and Officer Clinton located east of the Decedent. When he first observed the Decedent, he thought he was still breathing, so he asked Officers Perius and Clinton to maintain cover.

Per Officer Wishengard, he approached and placed handcuffs on the Decedent and proceeded to do a pat-down to locate additional weapons. In doing so, he located a knife underneath the Decedent. Officer Wishengard tossed the knife away from the Decedent and rolled him fully over to his back. He ordered Officer Clinton to return to his patrol vehicle because he was visibly shaking. He ordered Officer Perius to retrieve gauze and chest seals. Officer Wishengard began performing CPR. Approximately five to ten minutes later, an ambulance arrived on scene. The ambulance ran over the knife when it arrived. Officer Wishengard moved the knife to the dirt area on the side of the road.

4. NSP HP Trooper Austin Hortt

Trooper Austin Hortt was dispatched to a call regarding a park ranger out with a vehicle and was advised there was a gunshot wound. While enroute, he was further informed that the incident was an officer involved shooting. When he arrived on scene, he assisted in performing CPR by utilizing the bag valve mask to deliver breaths to the Decedent. Moapa Fire Chief arrived on scene and pronounced the Decedent deceased. Trooper Hortt observed a knife in the dirt next to the roadway.

Witnesses

1. Kayla Wolfe

Kayla Wolfe is a Park Interpreter with the Nevada Division of State Parks. At the time of the incident, she was in the visitor center when she heard "10-6" over the radio which indicated a traffic stop. Soon after, she heard a frantic voice stating a couple of unknown words followed by "shots fired, shots fired." Ms. Wolfe also heard radio traffic from Officer Perius saying he was responding to the incident.

Ms. Wolfe proceeded to call 911 and asked for medical response to the park. Administrative Assistant Tracy Strassburg used the radio to get additional details about the incident while Ms. Wolfe was on the phone with 911. She called 911 a second time to request additional police response. A 911 call/audio was not obtained.

2. Tracy Strassburg

Tracy Strassburg is an Administrative Assistant with the Nevada Division of State Parks. At the time of the incident, Ms. Strassburg was at the visitor center when she heard from Ms. Wolfe that "shots fired" was called over the radio. Ms. Strassburg contacted Officer Clinton over the radio and he advised her that he needed Officer Perius to respond to him. He also requested

1205P 1206P 1208P	02 called radio shutsfired often route 18 en voute 10 catled 01	122-1P	Notes inpaten Notes merginite on way Randy called
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medical response and additional backup. Ms. Strassburg contacted Officer Wishengard, who was off duty at the time, and asked him to respond to the east end of the park. Strassburg provided a copy of her handwritten notes that included a timeline of the events.

3. Stacy Alfonso

Stacy Alfonso is a Park Ranger Technician with the Nevada Division of State Parks. At the time of the incident, Ms. Alfonso was at the visitor center when she heard "shots fired," called over the radio. Ms. Alfonso responded to the scene of the incident with a medical bag. When she was advised the scene was safe, she drove past the scene and blocked the road.



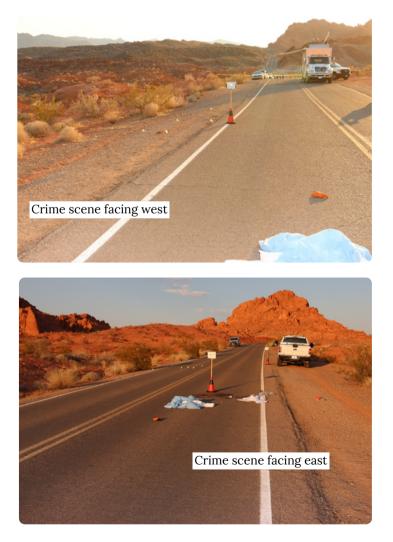
The next 7 pages contain sensitive content that some may find disturbing. Proceed with caution.

B. EVIDENCE RECOVERED

SCENE INVESTIGATION

Crime Scene Analyst (CSA), G. Tapay (Example) with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) was dispatched to the scene to collect and impound evidence. LVMPD's case file can be located under Event Number 240700038960. CSA Tapay authored a report dated July 10, 2024.

Per the report, the scene was located on the east/west oriented road with one lane going in both directions.



Five "WIN 9MM LUGER" cartridge cases (Items 6-10) were on the north side of the street in the dirt area east of the utility box.



There were five "WIN 9MM LUGER" cartridge cases (Items 1-5) in the dirt area west of the knife. In all, ten 9MM cartridge cases were recovered from the scene.



A kitchen knife with apparent blood on the blade and a broken handle (Item 17) was located in the dirt area south of the Decedent.



Vehicles 1 (V1) and 2 (V2) were both parked east facing in the dirt south of the street and southeast of the utility box.

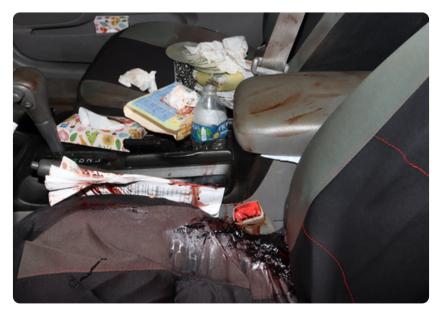


The doors of V1 were closed and the vehicle was running. There was apparent blood on the exterior front part of the rear left door and on the exterior bumper.

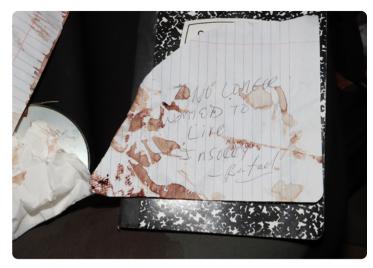


Inside the vehicle, there were areas of apparent blood including the interior front door (Item 20), the center console (Item 21) and on the front right passenger seatbelt (Item 23).





A handwritten note with apparent blood was found on the front passenger seat.



A wallet was located inside the vehicle, which included a Nevada Driver's License in the name of Rafael Rodriguez-Aguayo.

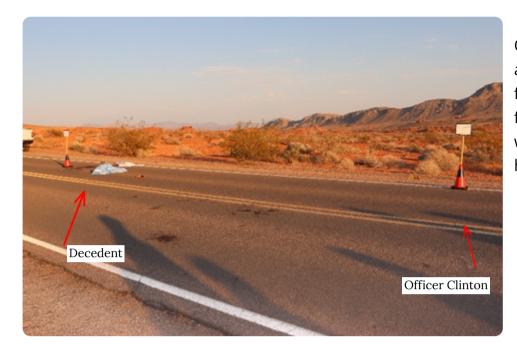




The Decedent was lying face up on the street in the eastbound travel lane south of the concrete utility box. Both hands were behind his back, and he was partially covered with a sheet. He wore blue jeans and blue sneakers.

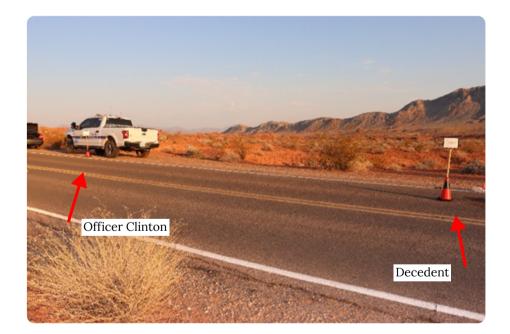


A diagram sketch with measurements was completed at the scene.



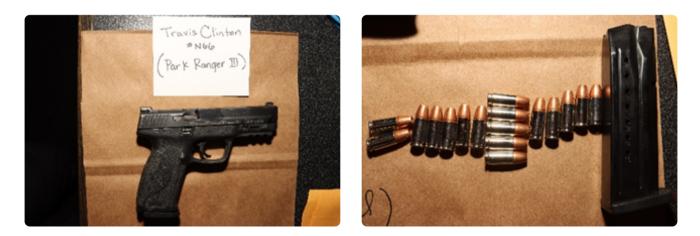
Officer Clinton was approximately 38 feet, 6 inches away from the Decedent when he first fired his weapon.

Officer Clinton was approximately 48 feet, 4 inches away from the Decedent when he fired his weapon the second time.



OFFICER CLINTON' S COUNTDOWN

Officer Clinton's firearm was secured by NDSP Regional Manager Craig Robinson following the incident and later provided to CSA Tapay. It was noted to be a Smith & Wesson M&P9 M 2.0 9MM semi-automatic handgun, serial number #NEZ5589. Upon examination, the slide was closed. The total count for the firearm was one (1) "WIN 9MM LUGER" cartridge in the chamber and a seventeen-capacity handgun magazine containing seventeen (17) "WIN 9MM LUGER" cartridges in the magazine well.





At the time of the countdown, Officer Clinton's handgun contained a total of eighteen ("18") cartridges -- seventeen cartridges in the magazine, and one in the chamber. Officer Clinton had performed a tactical reload, so based on information, it is believed Officer Clinton fired either 10 or 11 rounds. Ten casings were recovered at the scene, but whether Officer Clinton initially carried seventeen cartridges in the first magazine plus one in the chamber, or only seventeen total cartridges is unknown.⁵







OTHER RECOVERED EVIDENCE

The parents of the Decedent located an apparent suicide note at the Decedents residence. It stated the following: "Im really sorry but I could not keep suffering as much as I was. Thankfully I'm finally at peace. I love you Mom, I love you Dad, I love you Brother, I love you Sol. I am no longer suffering. I am no longer in pain. Thank you for all your love and support. I will always love you. Rafa." His father and brother indicated the Decedent was suffering from mental health issues.

C. AUTOPSY

On July 11, 2024, under Clark County Officer of the Coroner/Medical Examiner (CCOCME) Case No. 2024-04850, an autopsy was performed on the body of the Decedent at the CCOCME, by Doctor Nathan Shaller.

Dr. Shaller's report noted eight (8) intermediate-range gunshot wounds to Decedent's body. Five (5) gunshot wounds to the chest, two (2) gunshot wounds to the abdomen and one (1) gunshot wound to the leg. All gunshot wounds had a trajectory of front-to-back. Dr. Shaller recovered six (6) hollow point projectiles from the Decedents body.



Dr. Shaller also noted a cluster of multiple sharp force injuries of the neck with perforation of skin and soft tissue only. There were five (5) stab wounds in total. The stab wounds were all noted to be in the direction of front-to-back and downwards.

The cause of death was found to be multiple gunshot wounds. Sharp force injuries of neck were a major contributing factor. The manner of death was homicide.

Upon the completion of toxicology testing, the following positive findings were noted:

Analyte	<u>Result</u>	Units	Matrix Source
Amphetamine	480	ng/mL	001 - Peripheral Blood
Alprazolam	33	ng/mL	001 - Peripheral Blood
Delta-9 Carboxy THC	9.9	ng/mL	001 - Peripheral Blood
Delta-9 THC	34	ng/mL	001 - Peripheral Blood
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IV. LEGAL ANALYSIS

In Nevada, justifiable homicide is defined in various statutes (NRS §200.120 - Justifiable homicide, NRS §200.140 - Justifiable homicide by a public officer, NRS §200.160 - Additional cases of justifiable homicide). The shooting of the Decedent could be justifiable under either or both theories related to the concept of self-defense: (1) the killing of a human being in self-defense/defense of others; and (2) justifiable homicide by a public officer.

A. THE USE OF A DEADLY WEAPON IN DEFENSE OF SELF OR ANOTHER

"Justifiable homicide is the killing of a human being in necessary self-defense, or in defense of... a person, against one who manifestly intends or endeavors to commit a crime of violence..." against the other person. NRS §200.120(1).

A crime of violence is defined as any felony for which there is a substantial risk that force, or violence may be used against the person or property of another in the commission of the felony. NRS §200.120(3).

Homicide is also lawful when committed: [i]n the lawful defense of the slayer, ... or of any other person in his or her presence or company, when there is reasonable ground to apprehend a design on the part of the person slain to commit a felony or to do some great personal injury to the slayer or to any such person, and there is imminent danger of such design being accomplished NRS §200.160(1).

In *Runion v. State*, 116 Nev. 1041 (2000), the Nevada Supreme Court took the opportunity to set forth sample instructions for consideration by district courts in future cases where a criminal defendant asserts self-defense. The relevant jury instructions provided by the court are as follows:

- "The killing of [a] person is justified and not unlawful when the person who does the killing actually and reasonably believes: (1) That there is imminent danger that the assailant will either kill or cause great bodily injury; and (2) That it is absolutely necessary under the circumstances for him to use force or means that might cause the death of the other person, for the purpose of avoiding death or great bodily injury."
- "A bare fear of death or great bodily injury is not sufficient to justify a killing. To justify taking the life of another in the circumstances must be sufficient to excite the fears of a reasonable person placed in a similar situation. The person killing must act under the influence of those fears alone and not in revenge."
- Actual danger is not necessary to justify a killing. A person has a right to defend from apparent danger to the same extent as he would from actual danger. The person killing is justified if: (1) He is confronted by the appearance of imminent danger which arouses in his mind an honest belief and fear that he is about to be killed or suffer great bodily injury; and (2) He acts solely upon these appearances and his fear and actual beliefs; and, (3) A reasonable person in a similar situation would believe himself to be in like danger."
- "The killing is justified even if it develops afterward that the person killing was mistaken about the extent of the danger."
- "If evidence of self-defense exists, the State must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Decedent did not act in self-defense." Id. at 1051-52.

In Nevada, it is the State's burden in a criminal trial to prove each element of an offense beyond a reasonable doubt. If there is evidence that a killing was committed in self-defense or the defense of another, it is the State's responsibility at trial to prove the contrary.

Here, the known facts and circumstances indicate that the Decedent posed an imminent danger to Officer Clinton, and a reasonable person in a similar situation would believe Officer Clinton to have been in danger. This was a routine traffic stop until the Decedent exited his vehicle without prompting and brandished a knife while approaching Officer Clinton. Officer Clinton was alone, with no back-up in the near vicinity. The Decedents actions were quick, unanticipated, and Officer Clinton had little time to de-escalate the situation.

The evidence as known illustrates that Officer Clinton had a reasonable belief that the Decedent would cause him great bodily injury or death, and that he had already caused injury to another. Officer Clinton was confronted with the appearance of imminent danger when the Decedent approached Officer Clinton with the knife, and he acted out of a reasonable belief that he was about to be stabbed or killed. Officer Clinton reasonably acted in his own defense, and the shooting was therefore justifiable under this legal theory.

B. JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE BY A PUBLIC OFFICER

"Homicide is justifiable when committed by a public officer ... [w]hen necessary to overcome actual resistance to the execution of the legal process, mandate or order of a court or officer, or in the discharge of a legal duty." NRS §200.140(2). This statutory provision has been interpreted as limiting a police officer's use of deadly force to situations when the officer has probable cause to believe that the suspect poses a threat of serious physical harm to either the officer or another. See 1985 Nev. Op. Att'y Gen. 47 (1985).

When reviewing the evidence in this case, Officer Clinton had probable cause to believe the Decedent posed a threat of serious physical harm to him because the Decedent exited his vehicle during a police stop without prompting and approached Officer Clinton with a weapon. Decedent failed to comply with commands to drop his weapon. Officer Clinton was in close proximity to the Decedent at the time he fired his weapon and could have been killed. Therefore, deadly force by Officer Clinton was legally justified and appropriate under NRS §200.140(2).

Alternatively, NRS §171.1455 allows for the use of deadly force when effectuating arrest, but there are limitations. "A peace officer may, after giving a warning, if feasible, use deadly force to effect the arrest of a person only if there is probable cause to believe that the person: has committed a felony which involves the infliction or threat of serious bodily harm or the use of deadly force; or poses an imminent threat of serious bodily harm or death to the peace officer or to others." NRS §171.1455(2).

At the time of the shooting, there was probable cause to believe that the Decedent committed the crime of Assault with Use of a Deadly Weapon Against a Protected Person (NRS §200.471) against Officer Clinton. Prior to shooting, Officer Clinton activated his patrol lights and gave verbal commands to the Decedent to drop the knife while in uniform before discharging his weapon. Officer Clinton attempted to use deescalation techniques or alternatives to force, but Officer Clinton was given little time to react and therefore his actions were justified.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the review of the available materials and application of Nevada law to the known facts and circumstances, the State concludes the actions of NDSP Officer Clinton were legally justified. Nevada law clearly states that homicides which are justifiable or excusable should result in a person being acquitted and discharged. See NRS §200.190.

As there is no presently known factual basis upon which to charge, unless new circumstances come to light which contradict the factual foundation upon which this decision is made, no charges will be forthcoming against Officer Travis Clinton.